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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between knowledge of the English language and three variables--the number of courses taken in language study (excluding literature and composition), the number of years of experience teaching language, and self-assessment of knowledge of certain areas of the English language. Ninety-one English teachers in the Virginia school systems were administered Competency Test A: Knowledge of Language of the Illinois Tests in the Teaching of English (ITTE) and a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to obtain information on such measures as number of courses taken, years of teaching experience, self-assessment, age, and sex. Subcategories were developed for the ITTE which included the areas of how language functions, semantics, history of the English language, usage and dialect, traditional grammar, structural grammar, and transformational grammar. The results indicated that, in general, there is little relation between the number of courses taken in language preparation and the knowledge of the English language exhibited by teachers of English. Teachers with fewer years of experience scored better on the items concerning usage and dialect than did experienced teachers. (WR)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF PREPARATION, EXPERIENCE, AND SELF-ASSESSMENT TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF TEACHERS

10:45 - 11:45 a.m.
Thursday, May 2, 1974

International Reading Association Convention
New Orleans, Louisiana

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF PREPARATION, EXPERIENCE, AND SELF-ASSESSMENT TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF TEACHERS

Purpose

The major purpose of this study* was to investigate the relationship between knowledge of the English language and three variables--the number of courses taken in language study (excluding literature and composition), the number of years' experience teaching language, and self-assessment of knowledge of certain areas of the English language.

Background and Literature

Recommendations concerning the preparation of teachers in the English language have been in general agreement as to the nature of that preparation. The teacher, it has been felt, should have some historical perspectives on language, some understandings concerning the sound, structure and meaning patterns of English, some knowledge of grammatical systems, and some understanding of the choices available within language (CEEB, 1965; Crisp, 1967; Crowell, 1969; Dixon, 1967;

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*This study is a part of a doctoral dissertation completed in August 1973 at the University of Virginia. A similar study is being continued by applying the principles to undergraduate reading and language arts students.

Frazier, 1966; Grommon, 1963; Grommon, 1968; Hook, 1965; Hook, 1970; Marckwardt, 1968; Muller, 1967; NCTE, 1961; NCTE, 1964; Pearson, 1969; Shugrue, 1968; Tuttle, 1963).

Although there is much recommended for the linguistic preparation of teachers, a review of the literature indicates that there is virtually no research in determining where the recommendations have been carried out and the beneficial effect upon teaching language. Crowell (6) concluded that in-service preparation in transformational grammar did not help teachers retain terminolgy nor did it influence teachers to choose transformational grammar over traditional grammar nor that the teachers used their knowledge in any way but allowing them to make informed decisions about the grammar they would use.

With the wealth of materials purportedly grounded in the field of linguistics, the teacher has been hard-pressed to select the appropriate outlook toward his responsibilities in using linguistics or teaching language, including reading. According to National Council of Teachers of English reports (17) (18) , the teacher's collegiate training has usually neglected vast areas of language study. If any preparation was offered, that preparation was probably a single course in the history of language or a course in grammar.

The Commission on the English Curriculum (18) recommended the following topics for inclusion in an adequate linguistic training program for teachers of English; it is essentially the same as recommended by the English Teacher Preparation Study (20):

the nature of language as an arbitrary signaling system, its dynamic quality.

the relation of language and writing, the invention of writing systems, the spread of the alphabet.

phonetics and phonemics, the sound structure of modern English.

syntax, the syntactic structures of modern English.

transformational grammar, the process by which complex structures are produced.

the nature of appropriateness in writing, the control exercised by the publishing company, the development of dictionaries, the effect of handbooks of usage and style.

the historical development of English in England and America.

From these recommendations, the following areas were studied as areas of linguistic competence: knowledge of how language functions, including the dynamic quality of language and the role of language as a signaling system; knowledge of the history of language, including comparative studies with other languages and the basis for the present sound system; knowledge of usage and dialect, including areas of style and language manipulation; and finally, knowledge of systems of grammatical analysis, including the study of structures, syntax, and specific theories of grammatical analysis.

A review of the literature failed to produce any evidence that time which a teacher spends in the classroom teaching language produces a gain in knowledge about the English language for the teacher.

Crisp (5) reports that teachers with experience assess their knowledge and skill higher than teachers new to the classroom. However, no attempt was made to verify whether experienced teachers were more knowledgeable than less experienced teachers.

The purpose of this study, then, was to determine the strength of the

relation between knowledge in areas of the English language thought to be important as a basis for language teaching and factors which influence the linguistic preparation of teachers of language--course preparation, experience in teaching, and self-assessment of knowledge.

Design and Sample

This investigation involved the use of the "Competency Test A: Knowledge of Language" of the Illinois Tests in the Teaching of English* (8). The test apparently developed from work in the ILLINOIS STATE-WIDE CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS (14), and is designed to assess the degree to which a prospective teacher can identify professionally endorsed items as follows:

statements and terms used to describe how language functions;

statements and terms used to describe the principles of semantics;

statements and terms used by three systems of English grammar;

statements and terms used to describe the history of the English language, including its phonological, morphological, and syntactic changes; and

concepts about levels of usage and dialectology, including the cultural implications of both

There were no identified subtests in the published form of the test, so the investigator grouped the questions into subtests which reflected the identified areas of concern. The total number of items in each subtest is reflected in Table I.

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*The tests were published in February 1973 by Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois.

TABLE I

ITEMS IN EACH SUBTEST OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCY TEST A
(Numbers Correspond to Numbers of ITTE Test A Items)

Language, How Language Functions	Seman-tics	History of English Language	Usage and Dialect	Tradi-tional Grammar	Struc-tural Grammar	Transfor-mational Grammar
(5)	(12)	(12)	(19)	(11)	(13)	(12)

For this investigation, a reliability coefficient for the entire test was determined to be .84. Because of the small number of questions in each subtest low reliability values were found (2).

A questionnaire was developed to obtain other information: number of courses taken, years of teaching experience, self-assessment, age, sex, etc. Tables II and III reflect the frequency distribution of courses, experience, and average scores, and Tables IV and V reflect the percentages of self-assessment on the areas under study (2).

The sample of teachers consisted of ninety-one (91) English teachers in the Virginia school systems. The tests and questionnaires were distributed to department heads who supervised the completion of the instruments. The raw data were subjected to descriptive, correlational, and multiple regression analyses. Tables VI-IX reflect the results of the correlation and step-wise multiple regression analyses (2).

Findings

The descriptive results of the test and questionnaire are reported in Table VI. Since this was the first time the test was used outside of its development there is no basis for a comparison of the subtest results or the results of the questionnaire. However, the mean on the total test

TABLE II

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF COURSES

NUMBER OF COURSES	NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN THIS SAMPLE	AVERAGE SCORE
0	4	41.5
1	42	45.7
2	24	42.2
3	11	44.4
4	6	39.8
5	2	46.0
6	1	52.0
9	1	48.0

TABLE III

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN THIS SAMPLE	AVERAGE SCORE
1	11	54.3
2	16	45.3
3	10	35.2
4	17	44.5
5	6	44.7
6	5	46.8
7	4	53.2
8	2	54.5
9	4	35.0
10	3	30.3
11	2	40.5
12	1	45.0
13	2	44.5
14	2	38.5
15	1	26.0
16	1	30.0
17	2	47.0
22	1	52.0
35	1	48.0

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGES OF ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE FOR EACH CRITERION ON THE SELF-ASSESSMENT SCALE

Predictor Variable	Out-standing 1	Good 2	Fair 3	Below Average 4	Mini-mal 5
	%	%	%	%	%
3 How Language Functions	3.3	35.2	42.9	13.2	5.5
4 History of the English Language	1.1	18.7	31.9	31.9	16.5
5 Usage & Dialect	4.4	31.9	38.5	14.3	11.0
6 Grammar	1.1	26.4	45.1	16.5	11.0
7 Overall Average	2.2	24.2	46.2	24.2	3.3

TABLE V

COMBINED PERCENTAGES OF ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE

Predictor Variable	Outstanding-Good 1-2.5	Fair-Minimal 2.6-5.0
	%	%
3 How Language Functions and Semantics	38.5	61.6
4 History of the English Language	19.8	80.3
5 Usage and Dialect	35.3	63.8
6 Grammar	27.5	72.6
7 Overall Average	26.4	73.7

TABLE VI

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE CRITERION AND PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Variables	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
CRITERIA			
8 Sub-Test: How Language Functions and Semantics	17	10.11	2.47
9 Sub-Test: History of the English Language	12	5.34	2.19
10 Sub-Test: Usage and Dialect	19	9.96	2.91
11 Sub-Test: Traditional Grammar	11	5.91	2.24
12 Sub-Test: Structural Grammar	13	7.20	2.53
13 Sub-Test: Transformational Grammar	12	5.62	2.77
14 Sub-Test: Total Grammar	36	18.73	5.95
15 Total Test	84	44.05	11.27
PREDICTORS			
1 Language Courses Taken		1.89	1.39
2 Years Teaching English Language		5.73	5.39
3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions & Semantics		2.81	.89
4 Self-Assessment: History of the English Language		3.43	1.03
5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect		2.93	1.04
6 Self-Assessment: Two Systems of Grammar		3.10	.96
7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average		3.07	.79

TABLE VII

FIRST ORDER CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES OF KNOWLEDGE AND MEASURES OF PREPARATION, EXPERIENCE, SELF-ASSESSMENT

PREDICTORS		CRITERIA							
		How Language Functions, Semantics 8	History of the Language 9	Usage and Dialect 10	Traditional Grammar 11	Structural Grammar 12	Transformational Grammar 13	Total Grammar 14	Total Test 15
Number of Courses	1	.02	-.02	.10	-.08	-.08	-.14	-.13	-.04
Number of Years Teaching Language	2	.08	.16	.24**	-.11	-.10	.02	-.07	.07
SELF ASSESSMENT: How Language Functions, Semantics	3	.13	.20*	.05	.18*	.28**	.25**	.31**	.24**
SELF ASSESSMENT: History of the Language	4	.11	.19*	.02	.06	.05	.06	.07	.10
SELF ASSESSMENT: Usage and Dialect	5	.17*	.30**	.15	.13	.07	.28**	.21*	.24**
SELF ASSESSMENT: Two Grammars	6	-.04	.05	.08	.03	.02	.27**	.11	.02
SELF ASSESSMENT: Overall Average	7	.12	.23**	.04	.10	.11	.26**	.21*	.18*

*p < .05

**p < .01

TABLE VIII

SUMMARY OF SINGLE ORDER (r) CORRELATIONS:
Significant at the .05 Confidence Level

Criterion	Predictor	r
8 Sub-Test: How Language Functions and Semantics	None	
9 Sub-Test: History of the English Language	5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.30
	7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average	.23
	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.20
	4 Self-Assessment: History of the English Language	.19
10 Sub-Test: Usage and Dialect	2 Years Teaching Language	.24
11 Sub-Test: Traditional Grammar	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.18
12 Sub-Test: Structural Grammar	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.28
13 Sub-Test: Transformational Grammar	5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.28
	7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average	26
	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.25
14 Sub-Test: Total Grammar	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.31
	5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.21
	7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average	.21
15 Total Test	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics	.24
	5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.24
	7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average	.18

TABLE IX

SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE (R) CORRELATIONS:
Significant at the .05 Level of Confidence*

Criterion	Predictor	R
9 Sub-Test: History of the English Language	2 Years of Teaching the English Language 5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.36
10 Sub-Test: Usage and Dialect	2 Years of Teaching the English Language 5 Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect	.30
11 Sub-Test: Structural Grammar	3 Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics 7 Self-Assessment: Overall Average	.35

*No other multiple correlations were significant between groups of predictors and criterion.

score is higher in this sample of experienced teachers than the mean reported in the normative material found in the "Test Manual." Also the number of courses mean is compatible to the information in the NCTE surveys of 1961 and 1964, (17) (18).

Four of the seven predictor variables were significantly correlated with the subtest: History of the English Language. They were as follows: Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect; Self-Assessment: Overall Average; Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics; Self-Assessment: History of the English Language.

One of the seven variables was significantly negatively co-related with the subtest: Usage and Dialect. It seems that the longer a teacher has been teaching the English language the lower the score on this subtest.

The variable, Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics, correlates significantly with subtest: Structural Grammar.

Three variables correlated significantly with subtest: Transformational Grammar. They were as follows: Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect; Self-Assessment: Overall Average; and Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics.

The three variables which correlated significantly with subtest: Total Grammar were Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics; Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect; and Self-Assessment: Overall Average.

Finally, the three variables which correlate significantly with the Total Test were Self-Assessment: How Language Functions and Semantics; Self-Assessment: Usage and Dialect; and Self-Assessment: Overall Average.

While these correlation coefficients were significant, they were rather weak in indicating the strength of a relationship. See summary

Tables VII and VIII.

A step-wise regression technique was utilized to determine whether groups of predictor variables indicated a relationship with each criterion variable. These multiple relationships were summarized in Table IX.

Conclusions

1. In general, there is little relation between the number of courses taken in language preparation and the knowledge of the English language exhibited by these teachers of English. Even when studied in a multiple correlation, courses were among the least important predictors of linguistic knowledge.

Implication: School systems, certifying agencies, and national associations should look very carefully at the recommendations concerning numbers of courses which are required for a language teacher.

2. Teachers with fewer years of experience scored better on the items concerning usage and dialect than did experienced teachers, but in other areas the relationship between years of experience and knowledge of the English language probably appear only as a random occurance.

Implication: School personnel or persons who have the responsibility for training teachers in the area of language should consider carefully instituting planned in-service workshops and training sessions, because it is likely that experience in the classroom alone will not add to the linguistic knowledge of the teacher.

3. There is a tendancy for teachers to assess their knowledge of language generally accurately. While there is a lack of consistency in the correlations between specific areas of assessment and the corresponding area of knowledge, teachers may be giving a general assessment of their

knowledge in each of the areas requiring self-assessment rather than a definitive assessment of a particular area of knowledge.

Implication: Teachers need to have their opinions concerning their strengths and weaknesses voiced in order for proper supportive measures to take place, or for teachers to practice self-assessment.

Continuation of this study

This study is in the process of being modified to study the pre-service and in-service elementary teacher, especially the reading teachers and reading specialists. Many of the same recommendations made for language teachers are recommended for reading teachers and elementary teachers. In view of the findings of this study not only are the basic assumptions underlying the recommendations for language teachers challenged, but the assumptions which underlie the recommendations for the linguistic preparation of reading teachers. The findings do not challenge the issue of whether there should be linguistic preparation, but rather the process by which it is to take place.

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